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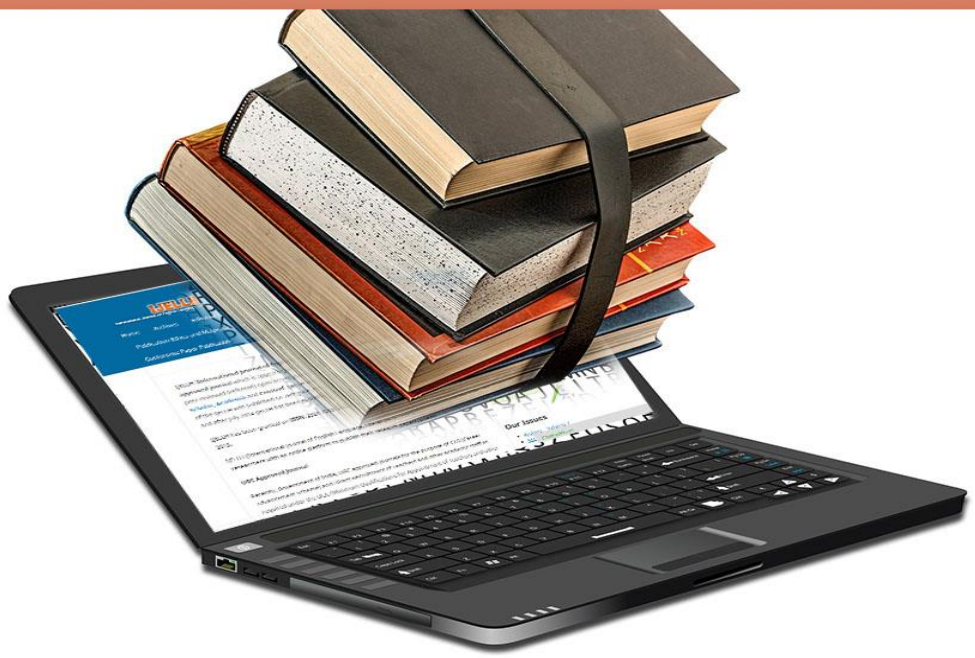

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Dr. Pratibha Kumar

Professor, Department of English

Govt .Mahakoshal Arts and Commerce College

Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, India

drkumar894@gmail.com

Breaking the Stereotype: The Shudras in Hinduism

Mythology is one of the ornamented axioms of Hinduism. All the texts of Hinduism are exceedingly translated in various languages because of its splendid richness. Puranas and Vedas gave world a meaning and life a motive. People who heard and perceived the Vedas first are hailed as Rishis. Society was crafted by Rishis based on what the Vedas unveiled. The society in Hinduism is divided in four Varna: Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Brahmans were the teachers of this society, the Kshatriyas its Protectors, the Vaishyas its providers and the Shudras its servant. Everything had a place in a society and everything reformed with recurring regularity. The present paper purports to Study the fourth hierarchy of Varna system "The Shudras in Hinduism" and their devotional Journey. The main aim of this research is also to uncover the misconceptions of caste system in Hinduism.

Shudras denotes the labouring class who serve others but they do shared the occupations with other Varnas, comprising traders and warriors. Some Shudras were also kings and ministers. Hinduism believes in the concept of Re-birth. So, everything was interconnected. In other lives, past or present, the Shudra of this life would be Vaishya, and the Kshatriya of this life would be Brahman, and Brahman of this life would be a Shudra. All four are dependent on each other for the survival of the society without interconnection of these four Varna, society will not run efficiently. Now let's see some of the short anecdotes of Shudras in Hinduism:

Krishna Dwaipyana means dark child who was born in a river island. Krishna Dwaipyana memorably known as Vedas whose father was Parasara, grandson of great Vasishtha, one of the seven rishis who heard the Vedas first. His mother Satyavati was a shudra and his father Parasara was a Brahmin. So, he was a half Brahmin and half Shudra but he was not at all oppressed for his varna status and was respected highly for his intellect. He was the complier of all four Vedas. He was the father of Pandu, Dhritrashtra and Vidhur. He is considered as the father of the Great Santana Dharma.

Ratnakar was a bandit who used to loot travellers in the deep forest and burglarize all their wealth to feed his family, one night, Narad muni was on his way to rishi Vasishtha's ashram. Ratnakar attacked Narad muni and demanded all his wealth. Narad muni convinced him of his evil ways and narrated the story of Rama to him and asked him to chant Ram-Ram. But ignorantly Ram-Ram was replaced by dead and dead. Ratnakar did penance for many years and an ant hill grew around him. Hence, he earned a name Valmiki. Maharishi Valmiki composed the Ramayana epic and became greatest Rishi and was the first poet (Adi kavi). A cruel hunter and thief converted into so great and wise after surrendering himself to God. Due to his self-realisation and strong determination he was able to become rishi of a Brahmin Varna irrespective of his being a Shudra.

Satyakam Jabali was the son of an unwed Shudra women named Jabal. His father was unknown. Jabali had a strong wish to study so he left home in search of a Guru and found Sage Gautam's ashram. He respectfully approached the sage and requested to accept him as his disciple. When guru enquired him about his family, he did not know anyone accept his mother so, he asked her mother, she told him to go and tell your Guru 'I am the son of Jabal my name is Satyakam Jabali'. He told Guru Gautam and he accepted him as his pupil because of his love for truth and keen willingness to learn. Satyakam's story is from *Chhandogopnishad* (4th chapter). According to Valmiki Ramayana, Jabali was the officiated priest and an advisor to

the Ayodhaya royalty during Lord Ram's period. He is also believed to have composed the celebrated Jabali Upanishads.

Shabri was a Shudra woman, she was born in a hunter's family, having born in a hunter's family she was not at all in favour of cruelty to animals. She left her family and approached to Rishi Matanga ashram in a jungle. He invited Shabri to stay in his ashram because of her humble nature. She started serving in the ashram and showed great devotion to Sage Matanga. Sage Matanga before his death promised Shabri that lord himself would visit her one day and from that day, Shabri eagerly waited for hosting lord Rama. She used to clean and decorate the ashram daily and pluck berry fruit and taste it before keeping it for lord Ram. When lord Rama arrived in the forest, hundreds of yogis were equally eager to host him but lord Rama visited Shabri. He was pleased with shabri's true devotion and patience and ate the berry tasted by his beloved Devotee.

Kewat was the poor boatman who helped Lord Ram, Sita and Laxman to reach the shore of river Ganga on the beginning of their exile. Sita mata gave her ring to lord Rama to pass it onto Kewat so they could pay him back something for his service but Kewat denied to accept the ring and told to lord Rama how can I take this because people of same profession do not charge each other for their services. A barber never accepts any charges when he gives haircut to another barber even washer-man never charges a fellow washer-man. We both of us do the same work. I ferry people from this shore of the Ganges to other and you my lord, ferry people across the ocean of Samsara, through the journey of the life. On hearing this, Lord Rama was very much touched by Kewat's devotion. He embraced him and promised to free him from the cycle of re-birth.

Nishadraj Guha was the Adivasi; He was the King of Kevati by the banks of river Ganga. He was a great devotee of lord Rama. Guha came to meet lord Rama in the forest. It was Guha who supplied a boatman to help Rama, Sita and Laxman to reach the shore. Guha

offered his best service to lord Ram, Sita and Laxman. Ram made tribal king Guha his friend. When Rama returned victorious after fourteen years in the forest, he did not forget to meet and greet his friend Nishadraj. Nishadraj was an emotional, genuine person, eager to help and befriend Rama and protect him if he could. It is this selfless association with Rama that makes him a character of Ramayana whose actions always tug at the heartstrings.

Rishi Matanga was born in a Chandala community yet he gained a very positive status by his strong determination. He did tapas for many years and was blessed by Goddess Parvati to become her father in her incarnation as Matangini. Lord Indra also gave him the power of moving like a bird and changing his shape at will and honoured him because of his persevered tapas for long-long years to elevate as a Brahman.

Vidura was the half-brother to the kings Dhritarashtra and Pandu of Hastinapura, born son of the sage Vyasa and Sudri, a lady-in-waiting to the queens. Amba and Ambika were frightened from Vyasa when satyavati told vyasa to impregnant them so they bore a weak(pandu) and a blind son (Dhritarashtra) Ambika sent her lady in waiting to Vyasa in next turn who was not frightened by Vyasa's appearance and bore a normal, healthy son, Thus, Vidura was born. Vidura was raised and educated by Bhishma. He was coined as the father of politics and is for his Vidurniti. In the *Mahabharata,* he was voice for reason and intellect.

Based on the above stories we can perceive Shudras were elevated in ancient Hinduism. Valmiki was born from a shudra and Vedvyas was born to a fisher woman. Satyakam Jabali believed to have composed the celebrated Jabali Upanishad, was born to unwed shudra mother and his father was unknown, Vidhura was born of lady servant, neither of his parent has royal blood but still he was raised by Bhishma as a Brahmin and he was the minister of Hastinapur Empire. Shabri was born in hunter’s race but due to her true devotion, she got salvation and she was not at all discriminated, Nishad Raj Guha was a friend of Lord Rama even though he

was a tribesman, Kevat was given a boon by lord Rama that he will be free from cycle of Rebirth, Matanga was a chandal but become a Brahmin.

It was only Karna and Eklavya who were oppressed in the society because of their lineage. One of the reason of their oppression was they both were highly determined and had true traits of a good warrior, Dronacharya was highly partial he wanted his student,Arjuna to be the best and he promised him that he would be the best archer among all the warriors in the land that's why he boycotted Karna and Eklavya. In spite of all the oppression and discrimination confronted by Karna and Eklavya, they both become legendary warriors and still remembered for their bravery and true devotion. Karna is always exemplified for his generosity.

Some other instances where people changed their Varna and chose the Varna they wanted to follow are: Parishad was the son of King Daksha but became a shudra. Further; he did tapasya to achieve salvation after repenting. Ailush Rishi was the son of a Dasai, gambler and of low character. However, he researched on Rig-Veda and made several discoveries. Not only he was invited by rishis but also made an Acharya. (Aitareya Brahman) Rathotar born to Kshatriya family become a Brahmin as per Vishnu puran and Bhaagvat. Ravan was born from Pultasya Rishi but became Rakshas. Nabhag, son of king Nedishtha, became vaishya.Many of his sons become Kshatriya. Trishaku was a king but became a chandal. Sons of vishwamitra became shudra. Vishwamitra himself was Kshatriya who later became a Brahmin. Varna means to choose and people that time were free to choose their category.

"O God Make me so gentle that all Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishayas and Shudras have affection for me."

(Yajurveda 18/46)

Vedas speak of good relation within all four varnas.

God says “O! Humans I gift you with this blissful knowledge of Vedas for all Brahmna, Kshatriya, Vaishyas as well as Shudra.This knowledge is for benefit of everyone.”

(Yajurveda 26/2)

God do not deny the knowledge of vedas for shudras. Shudras enjoys equal right to read Vedas as a Brahmin.

“I pray to God that O God! Let all Brahmnas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras glorify me.”

(Atharva Veda 19/62/11)

Vedas do not discriminate between different classes. They consider everyone as equal. Caste system has no support in Vedas, Upanishads or Gita. Vedic philosophy believes in the Varna system. If we talk about present society, Varna system has been misguided rashly in a caste form. Caste wasn't much a virtuous agenda in Hinduism. The Varna system implemented that time was just a substance of division of labour based on profession and responsibility. If we talk about caste or Jaati, identity of people within a single Varna led to the development of Jaati system inside the Varna system. There was no Jaati system in ancient India. Caste system became prevalent in the middle ages. It is based on the basis of birth order while Varna can be decided after accomplishment of one’s studies.

According to Bhagavad Gita, the importance is on Guna (Skill) and Karma (function) and not on Jaati (birth). The Varna or the order to which we belong is irrespective of sex, birth or breeding. A Varna is determined by nature and aptitude not by birth or genetics. Probably the Vedic reference to Varna is never ever physical but in contemporary context, varna system has lost its importance and effectiveness because of birth based Jaati system. Upward and downward mobility was possible that time because Varna system was an open system. People that time were free to choose their category and occupation but at present people are free to choose their occupation but they can’t change their birth-based caste and category. Varna

system was so flexible there was no restriction regarding food, marriage and social intercourse but nowadays people of low status are oppressed in the society and are imposed serious restrictions but gradually all the rigid rules are breaking down because of various government policies and mass awareness programs of equality .

The word "Shudra" has come in Vedas around 20 times. Nowhere has it been used in an offensively . Under no circumstances it is mentioned that shudras are untouchables, birth based, disallowed from the study of Vedas, reduced in status than Varnas, disallowed in Yajna's. All these cynicisms arrived with repentant understanding involving corruption over time due to foreign intrusions and Islamic invasion. Some corrupted Brahmins also distorted text of Hinduism for maintaining their high status and pride.

- Concluding, we can say that caste system is highly opposed in our Vedas, it is always people who made this system as custom. If we talk about Vedas, each Hindu whether Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are all Santana Dharami. What I know is, we were born as Humans and we will die as humans. It's not our Varna or caste which makes us superior but it's our virtuous thoughts and deeds which make us Superior. Hindu mythology always believes in Karma theory. If your karmas are moral and honest you can break the stereotype and jump off your caste and Varna status like many shudras in Hinduism elevated because of their true devotion, intellect and determination and many Brahmins were killed due to their evil karmas. Casteism, is a gigantic blot on the human society, Hinduism supports the "Vasudehvkutumbkam" concept, we all belong to each other, and only those who believe in the view of oneness can attain salvation.

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